

than later. I urge all Members to support this important legislation.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. MCNERNEY).

Mr. MCNERNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of H.R. 4590, a bill to authorize funding for numerous Department of Veterans Affairs construction projects throughout the Nation.

Funding for many of these projects was already appropriated in fiscal year 2016 but needs authorization, and this is what the bill does.

I want to thank Chairman MILLER and Ranking Member BROWN for their work and commitment to our Nation's veterans and for bringing this bill to the floor.

The VA is currently challenged by a growing backlog in construction projects and old infrastructure. The VA manages over 6,000 buildings and nearly 34,000 acres of land. Additionally, more than 4,000 critical infrastructure gaps remain, which are estimated to cost between \$56 billion and \$68 billion to close. A growing backlog in construction projects and infrastructure is leading veterans to have to wait too long to receive the care they need and deserve.

This list of construction projects is also one of the reasons I have introduced H.R. 4129, the Jumpstart VA Construction Act. This bill provides for public-private partnerships at the VA to expedite construction opportunities at the VA. H.R. 4129 will help maximize partnerships between Federal and non-Federal entities and ensure that we avoid the systemic problems that have plagued the VA in the past, projects like Denver and Orlando.

Meanwhile, H.R. 4590 also includes funding for the Livermore realignment project, as was mentioned by the chairman and ranking member. This is a project that is very important to the veterans of the Central Valley of California, including my district.

This funding would provide for the construction of a 158,000-square-foot community-based outpatient clinic in French Camp, California. While vets have been waiting for years, I fought for this project for at least 8 years. The French Camp community-based outpatient clinic will serve 87,000 veterans across a wide geographic area that includes San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Alameda Counties, among others. California's Central Valley veterans confront many obstacles accessing the care they need from the VA.

I want to tell you a little story. In Stockton, California, it is about a 3-hour commute to the nearest VA center, which is in Palo Alto. The commute takes long because it is a distance and because there is tremendous traffic. I took the ride along with one of our veterans a couple of years ago, and it took all day to go in for a half-hour appointment.

Now, not every elderly gentleman can sit in a car for 3 hours one way and then 3 hours back. This is a real hardship. Not only can they not sit in a car for that long, but they may not even have that kind of transportation. So this is very important. I am sure that all of these projects have that kind of a story.

We need more facilities. We need this authorization. Congress approved the Central Valley community-based outpatient clinic and community center in 2004 as part of the VA's Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services initiatives. In 2010, Congress appropriated \$55 million for land acquisition and to fund construction and planning. The project is ready to begin construction, and our Central Valley veterans are eager to see progress on a project that was promised to them in 2004.

The French Camp outpatient clinic would offer an array of services: primary care, mental health care, radiology, audiology, physical and occupational therapy, dental, and other specialty services throughout the telehealth system.

Veterans have sacrificed so much to protect our freedom and democracy. They deserve access to state-of-the-art healthcare facilities closer to home. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 4590.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 4590.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman MILLER, Ms. BROWN, and Mr. MCNERNEY for their work on this bill.

I encourage all Members to support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MILLER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4590, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### ABIE ABRAHAM VA CLINIC

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5317) to designate the Department of Veterans Affairs health care center in Center Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, as the "Abie Abraham VA Clinic", as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5317

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Abie Abraham of Lyndora, Pennsylvania, was stationed during World War II with the 18th Infantry in New York; three years with the 14th Infantry in Panama; 15th Infantry, unassigned in China, while the U.S.S. Panay was sunk; 30th Infantry, Presidio, San Francisco; and the 31st Infantry, Manila, Philippines, for nine years.

(2) During World War II, Abraham fought, was captured, endured the Bataan Death March and as a prisoner of war for three and a half years, was beaten, stabbed, shot, survived malaria and starvation to be rescued by the 6th Rangers.

(3) Abraham stayed behind at the request of General Douglas MacArthur for two and a half more years disinterring the bodies of his fallen comrades from the Bataan Death March and the prison camps, helping to identify their bodies and see that they were properly laid to rest.

(4) After his promotion in 1945, Abraham came back to the United States where he served as a recruiter and then also served two years in Germany until his retirement with 30 years of service as a Master Sergeant.

(5) Abraham received numerous medals for his service, including the Purple Heart, and had several documentaries on the Discovery Channel and History Channel.

(6) Abraham wrote the books "Ghost of Bataan Speaks" in 1971 and "Oh, God, Where Are You" in 1977 to help the public better understand what our brave men endured at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Army as prisoners of war.

(7) Abraham was a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Purple Heart Combat/Infantry Organization, the American Ex-POWs, the Disabled American Veterans, and the American Defenders of Bataan.

(8) Abraham was a volunteer at Veterans Affairs Butler Healthcare for 23 years from 1988 to 2011 and had 36,851 service hours caring for our veterans.

#### SEC. 2. ABIE ABRAHAM VA CLINIC.

(a) DESIGNATION.—The Department of Veterans Affairs health care center in Center Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, shall after the date of the enactment of this Act be known and designated as the "Abie Abraham VA Clinic".

(b) REFERENCES.—Any reference in any law, regulation, map, document, paper, or other record of the United States to the health care center referred to in subsection (a) shall be deemed to be a reference to the "Abie Abraham VA Clinic".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) and the gentleman from Florida (Ms. BROWN) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Tennessee?

There was no objection.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5317, a bill to name the Department of Veterans Affairs VA healthcare center in Center Township,

Butler County, Pennsylvania, as the Abie Abraham VA Clinic.

This bill is sponsored by Congressman MIKE KELLY from Pennsylvania. I am grateful to him for his work to introduce this legislation to honor a true American hero.

Master Sergeant Abraham lived a truly remarkable life. Born in Lyndora, Pennsylvania, as 1 of 11 children, he set a world record as a young teenager for sitting in a tree for 3½ months—that is rather amazing, I might add—according to his obituary in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

In 1932, at the age of just 19, he enlisted in the United States Navy. Two years later, he enlisted in the United States Army. Over the course of a 30-year military career, he served in the Philippines, China, Germany, Panama, and earned a number of well-deserved accolades, including the Purple Heart.

During World War II, he survived the Bataan Death March. Over the course of 3½ years in captivity, Master Sergeant Abraham was beaten, stabbed, shot, and starved. At one point, he contracted malaria. Instead of returning immediately to the United States following his rescue, Master Sergeant Abraham agreed to stay behind at the request of General Douglas MacArthur. For 2½ years, he worked to recover the remains of his fallen comrades and to ensure they received the respect they were certainly due.

Following his service, Abie Abraham devoted his time to caring for his fellow brothers and sisters in arms. He was a lifelong member of several veterans service organizations. He also volunteered at the VA Butler Healthcare Center, where, over the course of 23 years, he would spend almost 40,000 hours tending to veteran patients there.

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According to his obituary, Master Sergeant Abraham would arrive at the Butler VA facility at 6:45 in the morning, 5 days a week, and spend hours in greeting veteran patients, in helping them where they needed to go, in answering their questions, in bringing them coffee, and in generally making their experiences at the VA easier and better. In his spare time, he authored two books about his experiences in the military; he made public appearances at schools and community centers; and he participated in documentary films that have aired on the Discovery and History channels.

I must mention as well that, in addition to his being a hero on the battlefield and at the VA afterwards, an accomplished author, and an inspirational mentor, he was also a lightweight boxing champion and trainer.

In 2012, Master Sergeant Abraham died at the age of 98. Given his long and full life—a life that was characterized by service to others both in uniform and out—it is only fitting and appropriate that we honor Master Sergeant Abraham by naming the VA healthcare

center in Butler County, Pennsylvania, after him.

This legislation satisfies all of the committee's naming criteria and is supported by the Pennsylvania congressional delegation as well as by many VSOs.

Once again, I thank my colleague, Congressman MIKE KELLY, for introducing this bill, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 5317, a bill to designate the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare center in Center Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, as the Abie Abraham VA Clinic.

Born in 1913, Abie Abraham was a decorated World War II veteran who served in both the United States Navy and the United States Army and served in the Philippines, China, Germany, and Panama. As the text of the bill states, he was captured by the Japanese in the Philippines and survived the Bataan Death March and 3½ years as a prisoner of war. Not only did he survive that ordeal, but when General MacArthur asked him to stay and help identify the remains of his fallen comrades, he did so for almost 3 more years, making sure those who died in the Philippines received proper military funerals.

He wrote his first book, "Ghost of Bataan Speaks," in 1971 and wrote his second book, "Oh, God. Where Are You?" in 1997. His intent was to help the public better understand what took place with regard to our brave men being POWs at the hands of the Japanese.

Abie Abraham had received numerous medals for his service, including the Purple Heart. He was a life member of the VFW, the American Legion, the Purple Heart Combat/Infantry organization, the Ex-Prisoners of War organization, the Disabled American Veterans, and the American Defenders of Bataan. He had been a volunteer at the VA Butler Healthcare Center since 1988 and had volunteered over 38,000 hours. One of his favorite pastimes was helping other veterans.

For all that Mr. Abraham did during and after the war, I rise in support of this legislation to name this VA facility after him—a true American.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Butler, Pennsylvania (Mr. KELLY).

Mr. KELLY of Pennsylvania. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of my bill, H.R. 5317. This is the designation of the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare center in Center Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, as the Abie Abraham VA Clinic, as amended, and I urge its adoption.

I never called him "Abie." I always called him "Sergeant" or "Mr. Abra-

ham." I knew him, and he was not a very big man. If you were to see him, his stature, he was, probably, 5 feet, 5 inches or 5 feet, 6 inches. When I met him, it was a little bit later in life, and he never, ever bragged about his service. He never talked about it. I just knew him as a guy who lived in my hometown, as a guy who was a veteran, as a guy who was a prisoner of war; but then things started to unfold about what Mr. Abraham had endured. Now, I want you to think about this.

Once the Japanese attacked the Philippines and were able to take the peninsula at Bataan, Mr. Abraham survived the Bataan Death March. That was 6 days and 7 nights of endless marching without food, without water, without any type of medical care. He had been 3½ years interned in a Japanese prison camp. You heard what the doctor said and what Ms. BROWN said. This guy went through incredible pain and suffering to get there, but for as long as I knew him, he never bragged about it. He never said, "This is what I did." I never knew until he wrote the book about the ghost of Bataan.

I sat down with him one night, and I said: Mr. Abraham, you never told me about this.

He said: Well, you didn't need to know about this. It is just something we all did.

Every American came forward and did what he could do during World War II and continued to do it. There are 1.4 million Americans in uniform who have given their lives so that this country could survive, so that our country could survive.

If you knew Abie Abraham the way I knew Abie Abraham and the way the people in my town knew Abie Abraham, he was totally selfless. His whole mission in life was to serve veterans. In 1988, he visited somebody in the VA hospital, and he decided, after that, to stay. He stayed and he stayed and he stayed—almost 37,000 hours of volunteer service.

When you look at his gravestone—and I was there when he was interred in Arlington—it reads: "Born July 31, 1913. Died March 22, 2011." Yet they don't talk about the days in between. They don't talk about the minutes in between or about the hours in between or about the years in between—those 98 years he spent in service and, especially, the last years of his life.

If you were to have gone to the VA center in Butler, you would have seen he was there every morning at a quarter to 7. He was there to help people—to greet veterans, to let them know that they were appreciated. He used to tell people all the time, especially young people: When you meet a veteran, grab his or her hand and thank him for his service to America.

This is the type of America that I grew up in. I don't think it was unlike any other towns in America, and I don't think Mr. Abraham was different than any other citizen of America. They were just those types of people.

So now, for that veteran center to be named after Sergeant Abraham, I can't tell you the sense of pride it brings not only to the Abraham family and to my community in Butler, Pennsylvania, but to all of us, and to know that there are people out there who were willing to do these things, who were willing to sacrifice themselves. After being rescued—12,000 Americans were captured; he was 1 of 513 who survived. There were 12,000 who were captured, and 513 survived. The loss of life, the loss of future, the loss of enjoying a family—everything that life has to offer was taken from those people.

General MacArthur asked him: Abie, would you please stay and find those remains and dig them up so that you can bring some peace and comfort to those who died? Mrs. Abraham said Mr. Abraham would pray every night that the Lord would give him the strength to go out the next day because it was so horrible. He was digging up the remains, not of some people he didn't know, but of people who had actually been captured, of people he had marched with, of people he had tried to help get through this horrible time who had passed. His whole purpose in life was to bring peace to families, to bring peace to veterans, and to let them know how much he cared for them.

As a grateful country, we now have the opportunity to name a healthcare center after Sergeant Abie Abraham. He is truly somebody who befits the often said statement that there is only one office higher in our country than President, and that is that of patriot—not Republican, not Democrat, not Libertarian—patriot, American patriot. He was a man who loved peace and deplored the horrors of war but who never, ever tired in his service to his fellow servicemen, and he never, ever gave up. I can tell you, to his last day, Mr. Abraham thought about one thing every day, and that was about our men and women in uniform who gave their lives that this country—our country—could survive.

Do you know what? I know Mr. Abraham is looking down right now, and he is so happy that this facility is being named after him so that, for all time, he will be remembered.

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 5317.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As a fellow veteran, I can't think of anything that I would rather be doing this afternoon than naming this VA center for this incredible American hero. Once again, I encourage all of the Members to support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. ROE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5317, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### VETERAN ENGAGEMENT TEAMS ACT

Mr. ROE of Tennessee. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3936) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program under which the Secretary carries out Veteran Engagement Team events where veterans can complete claims for disability compensation and pension under the laws administered by the Secretary, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3936

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veteran Engagement Teams Act" or "VET Act".

#### SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM ON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VETERAN ENGAGEMENT TEAM EVENTS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—

(1) PILOT PROGRAM.—Beginning not later than October 1, 2016, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a three-year pilot program under which the Secretary shall carry out events, to be known as "Veteran Engagement Team events". The Secretary shall ensure that such events are carried out—

(A) during the first year during which the Secretary carries out the pilot program, at least once a month in a location within the jurisdiction of each of 10 regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs, including at least two regional offices in each of the five districts of the Veterans Benefits Administration under the organization of such Administration in effect as of the date of the enactment of this Act; and

(B) during each of the second and third years during which the Secretary carries out the pilot program, at least once a month in a location within the jurisdiction of each of 15 regional offices of the Department, including at least three regional offices in each such district.

(2) VETERAN ENGAGEMENT TEAM EVENTS.—During each Veteran Engagement Team event, the Secretary shall provide assistance to veterans in completing and adjudicating claims for disability compensation under chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code, and for pension under chapter 15 of such title. The Secretary shall ensure that—

(A) all Veteran Engagement Team events occur during the normal business hours of the sponsoring regional office;

(B) the events are carried out at different locations within the jurisdiction of each regional office and at least 50 miles from any regional office;

(C) a sufficient number of physicians (to be available for opinions only), veteran service representatives and rating veteran service representatives, and other personnel are available at the events to initiate, update, and finalize the completion and adjudication of claims;

(D) veterans service organizations have access to the events for purposes of providing assistance to veterans; and

(E) a veteran who is unable to complete and adjudicate a claim at an event is informed of what additional information or actions are needed to finalize the claim.

(b) LOCATION.—In selecting locations for Veteran Engagement Team events under this section, the Secretary shall—

(1) coordinate with veteran service organizations and State and local veterans agencies; and

(2) seek to select locations that are community-based and easily accessible.

(c) TRANSFER OF PERSONNEL.—

(1) PHYSICIANS.—The Secretary may not permanently transfer any physician employed by the Veterans Health Administration for the purpose of staffing a Veteran Engagement Team event.

(2) PAYMENT OF SALARIES.—Any amount payable to an employee of the Department for work performed at a Veteran Engagement Team event is payable only from amounts otherwise available for the payment of the salary of the employee. No additional amounts are authorized to be appropriated under this section for the payment of salaries for Department employee.

(d) OTHER AUTHORITIES.—In carrying out the pilot program under this section, the Secretary may—

(1) coordinate with States, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private sector entities to use facilities to host Veteran Engagement Team events for no or minimal costs; and

(2) accept, on a without compensation basis, services provided by non-Department physicians in rendering medical opinions relating to claims for compensation and pension.

(e) CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS.—In carrying out the pilot program under this section, the Secretary shall collect and analyze information about the customer satisfaction of veterans who have received assistance at a Veteran Engagement Team event.

(f) REPORTS.—Not later than April 30, 2017, and annually thereafter beginning on October 1, 2017, for the duration of the program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation and effectiveness of the events. Such report shall include—

(1) the number and types of claims completed and adjudicated at the events;

(2) the number and types of claims for which assistance was sought at the events that were not completed or adjudicated at the events and the reasons such claims were not completed or adjudicated; and

(3) an analysis of the customer satisfaction of veterans who have received assistance at an event based on the information collected under subsection (e).

#### SEC. 3. MODIFICATION TO LIMITATION ON AWARDS AND BONUSES.

Section 705 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-146; 38 U.S.C. 703 note) is amended to read as follows:

#### "SEC. 705. LIMITATION ON AWARDS AND BONUSES PAID TO EMPLOYEES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

"The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that the aggregate amount of awards and bonuses paid by the Secretary in a fiscal year under chapter 45 or 53 of title 5, United States Code, or any other awards or bonuses authorized under such title or title 38, United States Code, does not exceed the following amounts:

"(1) With respect to fiscal year 2017, \$250,000,000.

"(2) With respect to each of fiscal years 2018 through 2024, \$360,000,000."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from